

Application for Accreditation Organizations to Demonstrate Alignment with ExceleRate Illinois QRIS

Philosophy

It is Illinois' desire to help support and to motivate programs to achieve and sustain higher levels of quality to ensure that all children, particularly those most at-risk for poor educational outcomes, are receiving high quality early learning services. There are many strategies by which programs work on continuous quality improvement, a major one of which is accreditation. Further, it is our desire to create a system and process that helps to align and integrate all these strategies for improvement and mitigate extra or duplicate efforts for programs at the local level. The application process described in this document is designed to help Illinois and our early care and education programs better integrate nationally recognized accreditation standards with ExceleRate Illinois.

Background

ExceleRate Illinois is Illinois' new Quality Rating and Improvement System for early learning and development programs. (Note: ExceleRate Illinois replaces the former Illinois Quality Rating System, Quality Counts.) As of July 1, 2013 all licensed child care programs, Preschool for All programs, center-based Prevention Initiative, center-based Head Start/Early Head Start, and preschool special education will participate in the ExceleRate Illinois QRIS system.

There are four Circles of Quality—Licensing, Bronze, Silver and Gold—and awards of excellence in specific programmatic areas including preschool teaching, infant toddler, and family engagement among others. The first circle of quality in ExceleRate Illinois equates to current Illinois licensing standards, and subsequent circles of quality incrementally build upon this foundation with increasing requirements. The Bronze Circle of Quality primarily includes additional requirements for training (list of trainings is included as Appendix B), The Silver Circle of Quality focuses programs on self-assessment processes and plans for improvement and the Gold Circle of Quality identifies programs that are operating robust, consistent high-quality early learning programs validated by external bodies.

Illinois' QRIS is organized around four main areas of program quality: 1) Teaching and Learning, 2) Family and Community Engagement, 3) Management and Leadership, and 4) Qualifications and Continuing Education. There are requirements in each category along with indicators of evidence that a program meets those requirements. Illinois' QRIS incorporates several "industry standard" tools for measuring program quality including the Environment Rating Scales (ERS), the Program Administration Scale (PAS), and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). In order to demonstrate alignment with quality standards in the Illinois QRIS, national accrediting bodies will be required to demonstrate alignment with Illinois standards and organizational capacity to ensure accredited programs implement accreditation requirements on a regular basis. Accredited programs may also be required to meet some additional standards to attain a specific level in the Illinois QRIS.

Complete details of the Illinois QRIS requirements for the Silver and Gold Circles of Quality are included in the Appendix to the application.

Process

The process for demonstration of alignment with ExceleRate Illinois consists of completing the application below addressing 1) Organizational Capacity and Accreditation Process Criteria and 2) Alignment with specific ExceleRate Illinois Program Standards. The application will be reviewed by a Committee who will recommend to the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) for

which specific standards (and at what circle of quality) the accreditation will be considered sufficient evidence.

Accreditation Committee

The Committee's role is to review applications and make recommendations to OECD within 60 days of receipt of an application. The OECD Executive Director will review the recommendations of the Committee and will make the final decision and transmit this, in writing, to the applicant. The Accreditation Committee's review panel consists of a representative from the OECD, a representative from the Illinois Department of Human Services, a representative from the Illinois State Board of Education, a member from the Early/Head Start community, and a member from an organization or individual who has substantive expertise in early childhood education and quality improvement (such as higher education, or a community organization).

Criteria

All accrediting institutions applying to be a Recognized Accrediting Organization under the ExceleRate Illinois program must satisfactorily meet all of the criteria listed below. Applications must describe how they meet the criteria listed below and submit supporting documentation:

Criterion I: Fiscal and Administrative Capability for Administering an Accrediting Process (3 pages maximum)

- A. **Demonstrated Fiscal and Administrative Capability**
Describe in sufficient detail the organizational capacity for administering an accreditation program (supporting documents may be included such as the most recent audit or annual financial report, current operating budget, organizational chart, staff resources, job descriptions, etc.). *Submit supporting documents as an appendix.*
- B. **A Nationally Established Program**
A nationally established accreditation program must be established for at least 3 years and oversee accredited programs in multiple states. Document how long the program has been in existence, the number of accreditation visits conducted and the number of currently accredited programs nationally and in Illinois.
- C. **Verifiable, Public Listing of Accredited Programs**
Indicate how and where the accrediting body maintains a verifiable, current, public listing of accredited programs.

Criterion II: Administrative Policies and System Evaluation Procedures (5 pages maximum) Describe the administrative policies and system evaluation capacity of the administering agency including the following components:

- A. **Administrative Policies**
Administrative policies and system evaluation procedures are in place to avoid conflicts of interest and address issues such as deferred status, withdrawal of accreditation, appeal processes, and complaints.
- B. **Validator/Assessor Qualifications**
Describe the academic qualifications and formal training requirements of the accrediting body's staff and/or contractors, including those who complete on-site program validation or assessment visits.

C. Quality Assurance

Describe training procedures for on-site validators/assessors. Describe (including frequency) procedures for ensuring inter-rater reliability for on-site validations/assessments.

Criterion III: Accreditation Process (10 pages maximum) Describe the accreditation process including the following components:

A. Self-Evaluation

Describe the accreditation program's self-evaluation process for programs. Note: it is expected that the process is comprehensive and includes parents, staff, and program administrators, and that the process promotes program improvement.

B. On-site Program Review

Describe the review process (program and administrative) including on-site reviews of programs applying for accreditation.

C. Decision Process

Describe the process by which the accreditation decision is made by experts in the field after a review of all documentation, and based on boundaries and criteria established by the organization for the guidance of these experts.

D. Award Period

Describe the length of the award period and the process for interim accountability to ensure maintenance of high quality standards. Be sure to include frequency of interim program reports, content of the reports, process for turnover, etc.

Criterion IV: Institution's Standards for Early Learning Programs or School-Age/Afterschool Programs

A. Crosswalk of Accreditation Standards

Provide a crosswalk of the accreditation standards with applicable ExceleRate Illinois Standards **on the chart provided in Attachment A**. The crosswalk demonstrates how the accreditation standards address the categories defined in ExceleRate Illinois. Also, illustrate how the accreditation standards might address additional areas. Highlight in yellow areas where the accreditation standard does not meet the ExceleRate Illinois standard or write 'Not Covered' and highlight in yellow where the accreditation program does not have a similar standard. At the bottom of the chart, list areas covered in the accreditation which do not have a similar ExceleRate Illinois standard.

B. Research Base

Program standards must be evidence-based and periodically updated. Provide information about the research basis for the accreditation standards, the review cycle of the standards and the date of the latest accreditation standards update. Also provide citations and a summary of recently published research on the accreditation.

C. Validation

All accrediting institutions applying to be a Recognized Accrediting Organization under the ExceleRate Illinois program must submit a *validation study research brief*. This brief must indicate empirical evidence used to validate the accreditation, including a recognized

benchmark of program quality. Research-based validation must be met in order for the institution to be recognized as an accrediting agency by ExceleRate Illinois.

- At a minimum, the research should present quantitative evidence that accreditation measures are strongly related to a recognized benchmark of program quality. Describe the methods, analysis, and findings of the research.
- Depending on availability of data, research might include statistical correlations, odds ratios, or predictive models to establish a robust picture of the relationships being examined.
- Inasmuch as possible, the sample should be representative of current Illinois children and providers (Illinois' demographics closely mirror national demographics).
- The accreditation and data collection process must be appropriately blinded to the research objectives.
- *While the research methodology is not prescribed, it must be approved* and should contain:
 - Context of the study(ies) as background: characteristics of providers (provider type, center size, etc.), blind study, etc.
 - Narrative regarding data collection methodologies and protocols
 - Research findings

Resources and References for ExceleRate Illinois QRIS

Illinois Licensing Standards for Child Care Facilities:

<http://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/089/08900407sections.html>

Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (IELDS):

http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/early_learning_standards.pdf

Illinois Early Learning Guidelines for Children Birth to Age Three:

<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/earlychi/pdf/el-guidelines-0-3.pdf>

Gateways to Opportunity Illinois Professional Development System: <http://www.ilgateways.com/en/>

Environment Rating Scales (ECERS and ITERS): <http://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>

Program Administration Scale: <http://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/program-administration-scale-pas-2nd-ed/>

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): <http://www.teachstone.org/about-the-class/>

For Questions, Contact:

Theresa A. Hawley, Ph.D.

Theresa.Hawley@Illionois.gov or (312) 814-6348

Submit Accreditation Packet to:

Theresa A. Hawley, Ph.D.

Executive Director

Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development

160 North LaSalle, Suite N-100

Chicago, IL 60601